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ABSTRACT

As part of a larger project which attempted to integrate students with severe disabilities into regular recreational and leisure activities, this study used a peer interest survey to identify popular recreation activities (and thus appropriate possibilities for the target population) across a variety of age groups. The survey was completed by 619 youth (ages 3 through 22) in regular education and recreation settings. The survey covered: what the respondent does for fun during free time; individual activities; activities with friends and families; sports; toys; number of people involved in a fun activity; transportation to an activity; music; membership in organized groups; and willingness to include a person with a disability. Findings are detailed in tables. Discussion of findings notes the wide variety of activities available to young people, small group size for most activities, transportation as a problem for all youth and families, relatively low interest in playing music, and relatively high interest in participating in sports. Most youth were receptive to including youth with disabilities in their recreational activities. (Contains 10 references.) (DB)

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Having Fun: What's In and What's Not

EC 302931

Training and Research Institute for People with Disabilities

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Having Fun: What's In and What's Not

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Having Fun: What's In and What's Not

The need for integrated age-appropriate school, work, and community experiences for individuals with disabilities has been well documented over the past decade (Bruininks & Larkin, 1985; Sailor, Wilcox & Brown, 1980; Taylor, Biklen & Knoll, 1987). Current best practices stress both the need for children with disabilities to develop friendships with peers who are not disabled (Stainback, Stainback & Forest, 1989) and the need for communities to provide integrated recreation activities for all ages (Schelein & Ray, 1988). A great challenge for all those involved in social or recreation programs is to advocate for choice and opportunity that represent activities that are "in" or popular for particular age groups.

Identifying popular activities is important for many reasons including facilitating friendship, decision making, and age-appropriateness. First, if an individual with a disability is going to have the opportunity to develop friendships with others in his/her community, it is critical that he or she share areas of common interest (Perske, 1988). Participation in integrated recreation is one way that individuals with disabilities can meet nondisabled people and participate in activities that are mutually satisfying. This also allows for greater opportunity to meet a wide range of people from which friends may be chosen. Second, providing individuals with disabilities with a wide array of age-appropriate recreation options from which to choose builds the individual's capacity for decision making in all facets of life. Third, relying on adults to randomly select an activity

for a child based on adult recollections or impressions of what is popular may result in the identification of activities that are age-inappropriate and not current (York, Vandercook, & Stave, 1990). This ultimately may only serve to further stigmatize and isolate the individual. Fourth and most importantly, exposure to numerous age-appropriate recreation options ensures that the individual has a greater chance, over time, of choosing activities that can be enjoyed for years.

Identifying recreation activities that are currently popular with different age groups can be difficult because of the diversity of youth and the regional differences that exist throughout the country. A survey can be administered in order to discover what kids of a certain age and gender in a certain location like to do. One can also talk to program directors to identify popular activities (e.g., the local YMCA may have so many karate participants that they have to offer two sessions while the bowling class is half empty). Most importantly, one can talk to kids who are not disabled, watch them play, and consider all these options as options for <u>all</u> young people. Finally, if there are few options in a community, one must find out what kids would <u>like</u> to do and create activities that anyone might enjoy. In general, strategies for identifying popular recreation activities may include: (a) formally surveying individuals regarding their recreational preferences; (b) informally asking individuals what they like to do for fun; (c) simply noticing what others in a particular age group are doing

for fun and relaxation; and (d) asking program directors which activities are most popular for various age groups.

The purpose of this paper is to detail the methodology, results, implications and future recommendations for using a peer interest survey to identify popular recreation possibilities across a variety of age groups.

Methodology

Students

A peer interest survey was completed by 619 youth from ages 3 through 22 including 338 females and 281 males (see Table 1). The students were randomly selected across a variety of regular education and recreation settings including day care centers, public schools, summer camps, and universities in metropolitan Boston, Massachusetts. The sample represented cultural and socio-economic diversity. The majority of students independently completed the survey during school/camp hours except in the case of students in day care centers and those kindergartners and first or second graders who were not yet able to read. Parents of students in day care centers completed the surveys in their homes and three project staff administered the survey to students who were not able to read by reading it to them and recording their answers. Written and verbal assurances were given that all survey answers would remain confidential.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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The Survey

The survey was designed to discover how kids spend their free time. It was piloted with a small sample, modified, and then implemented with a sample of 619 youth. The survey consisted of four pages with a total of 15 open-ended and multiple choice questions. The questions included general inquiries about free time as well as more specific questions regarding sports, music, individual activities, organizations, etc. The types of questions asked were chosen based on current research regarding the types of activities kids participate in today (York et al, 1990; Smith, 1990).

Results

Included here are a cross section of questions from the Peer Interest Survey and a brief discussion of the findings related to these particular questions.

What do you do for fun or in your free time?

Participants were given three blank spaces, numbered one through three, to complete this open ended question. Figure 1 depicts the most frequently chosen activity in response to this question for males and females by age groups. The variety of responses received for this question included over 200 different activities. Therefore, the students' specific narrow responses (e.g., rugby) were analyzed and placed into ten broader categories (e.g., sports) which included the arts, clubs/organized activities, friends/family, individual activities, events, play, sports, toys, work, other. The most

frequently chosen activity categories included individual activities, friends and family.

Individual activities. This category includes activities typically engaged in alone and can include, but are not limited to, what are usually described as hobbies. Although these activities may be done in a group, the people who mentioned them made the activity, rather than other participants the focus. Examples include collecting items, driving, eating (not "going out to eat"), listening to music, reading, making models, taking care of a pet, sunbathing, and watching television.

Friends and family. This category includes activities that were named as occurring with friends or family members. For example, "hanging out with friends" and "talking to cousins" are found in this category. Activities such as "going to the mall with friends" were also included in this category since they specifically state the activity being done with others (vs. just "going to the mall" which would be found in the events category). Also included are responses like playing with sibling, hanging out, having sex, going to parties, and talking on the phone.

Sports. Included in this category are both individual and team physical activities (excluding those found in other categories, such as ballet [the arts]). Organized games fit into this category (e.g., basketball, baseball, kickball), as well as individual sports and exercises (e.g., aerobics, lifting weights, fishing, ice skating, running). For younger children, activities which require physical exertion (e.g., running around, climbing rocks, jumping rope, climbing trees) were also included here.

Toys. This category was surprisingly utilized by all age groups surveyed, although frequency did decrease as age increased. Included in this category are items which one might find in a toy department or store (e.g., action figures, nintendo/video games, blocks, board games, cards).

Also, responses indicated that at the youngest age, boys are interested primarily in toys then gradually change to sports. Sports remain by far the most frequently picked activity from age nine through 22 (see Figure 1). Girls from ages three to five chose sports as their primary interest and then did so again from ages nine to eleven. They were primarily interested in individual activities between the ages of six and eight, and from age twelve through 22 they were involved primarily with friends and family.

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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There were a total of 1,732 responses to this question (each participant was permitted up to three responses). Table 2 provides a listing of some of the most frequently picked activities from the most frequently picked categories. The Toys and Individual Activities categories include all toys/activities which had more than one response. The Sports category includes all sports that had more than five responses. All numbers are real numbers and not percentages.

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Insert Table 2 about here

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When you are doing something for fun, is it usually by yourself, with one to three other people, or in a group of people larger than three?

In response to this question, participants were asked to check the box which most often applied and were given three choices: a) by myself; b) with one to three other people; or c) with more than three people. Figure 2 depicts the responses of all participants. No significant differences were found between the various age groups. As expected, most people did not spend their "fun" time alone; only 11% of the females and 17% of the males chose this option. Instead they spend their time in small groups including one to three other people (62% female and 53% male).

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Insert Figure 2 about here

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How do you get to activities that you do for fun when you have to leave home to do them?

Participants were given seven choices as responses to this question (i.e., my parents, my bike, I walk, public transportation, my friends parents, I drive myself, other) and asked to check the answer that most often applied to them. Figure 3 depicts the results of this question. The data clearly identifies that through age 14, parents are the number one mode

of transportation and walking the number two mode. From age 15 through age 17 these two reverse positions and walking becomes the number one picked mode of transportation (perhaps because it becomes "uncool" to be seen with one's parents). Finally, from age 18 through 22, driving oneself becomes popular, yet walking still remains as the number two choice with 35% of the participants selecting it as their option.

What sports or physical activities do you most enjoy doing?

Participants were given four blank spaces numbered one through four to complete this open ended question. Out of 619 participants only 7% did not list at least one sport as a response. A total of 1,576 responses were given including over 100 different answers. Table 3 indicates the four most frequently chosen sports/physical activities for each age group according to gender. For example, 53% of the 12-14 year old females surveyed enjoy basketball and 25% enjoy softball; 65% of the 6-8 year old males enjoy baseball. Because participants were able to list four choices, there is some duplication across the responses; hence the percentages for any given age group may equal more than 100%.

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Insert Table 3 about here

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Do you sing or play any musical instrument?

Participants were given five blank spaces, numbered one through five, to complete this open ended question. Responses were categorized into six categories (i.e., brass, keyboard,

percussion, voice, string and wind). Table 4 indicates the percentage of participants by age who play instruments in these categories. Forty-two percent of participants played at least one instrument. Thirty-six instruments and types of singing were listed by participants; the most popular were singing, piano, violin, guitar and recorder.

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Insert Table 4 about here

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Are you a member of any organized groups, organizations, clubs, teams, or do you take any lessons?

Participants were given five blank spaces, numbered one through five, to complete this open ended question. Responses to this question were categorized into seven different areas: The Arts, Political, Social, Academic, Religious, Sports and Other. These categories and the percentage of students who selected an activity in the category are shown in Figure 4 with some of the more popular responses listed beneath

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Insert Figure 4 about here

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each heading. Table 5 lists all the different responses (a total of 159) given by the participants.

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Insert Table 5 about here

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Would you consider inviting a person with a disability to join you in "having some fun" if there were such a person who was looking to make new friends? Please check the response that best identifies how you feel.

Participants ages 6-22 were asked to complete the above question and were given choices of "yes", "no", and "not sure". In the 3-5 age group the question was worded a bit differently because the parents were completing the survey on behalf of their children. In the youngest age group, parents were asked, "Would you like your child to have opportunities to interact and develop friendships with children who have disabilities?" They were given the same response options. Table 6 indicates the responses to this question listed by age and gender and includes a column for participants who did not respond to this question ("no answer").

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Insert Table 6 about here

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Implications

This peer interest survey identified a wide array of recreational activities which are available and choosen by young people today. The variety of activities is striking, especially when compared to the often limited selection of "special" programs specifically designed for people with disabilities (e.g., adapted aquatics, bowling, Special Olympics). Enabling students with disabilities to choose to participate in the same activities as their nondisabled peers empowers them not only with

decision making skills but also with the ability to develop opportunities, networks into other life domains, supports, and friends that may last a lifetime. As professionals or volunteers assisting youth with disabilities, we need to look at the entire array of recreation activities available in the community rather than only selecting special programs offered by the recreation department, Easter Seals, ARC, Special Olympics, etc.

When looking at less formal activities (e.g., hanging out at the mall or listening to music) one may want to pay attention to the size of the group participating in the activity. Although some people do spend their fun time in groups larger than three, the low percentage of those surveyed who chose this option illustrates that large groups of people with disabilities recreating together is not typical.

Transportation is also a concern for <u>all</u> youth and families. Unfortunately, separate transportation systems that are solely provided for youth with disabilities have been established in many communities throughout the country (e.g., transportation to and from school, the work place, doctors appointments, etc.). This often creates the expectation that transportation will be available for all facets of an individual's life, including recreation. When this does not occur, a youth often loses the option to take part in that activity because his/her parents/guardians decide that special transportation must be available.

Although no one would argue with the assertion that it would be more convenient if transportation to an activity were always

an option, this is a rare occurrence for anyone. Additionally, if acceptance as just another one of the gang is what is desired through integration, then transportation options must be similar for people with and without disabilities. This highlights the need to teach students with disabilities to travel independently and with their peers. This is especially poignant since one of the most popular modes of transportation is walking which is relatively easy to teach and cost free. The difficulties of transportation are experienced by all parents, not just those of children with disabilities. If your facility/activity cannot provide transportation, one alternative would be to talk to parents and participants about initiating a system whereby carpools for transporting all participants can be arranged prior to the start of the activity.

Additional implications from these data revolve around the low interest demonstrated in playing music and the high interest in participating in sports and organized activities. Although 42% of those surveyed listed at least one instrument, this was not nearly as high as the 93% of people who listed at least one sport or the 67% of people who listed organized activities excluding the 3% of people who listed only music lessons in this later category). The fact that only 7% of those surveyed indicated no answer when asked about enjoyable sports/physical activities illustrates the importance of participating in this area throughout childhood and into adulthood. Also striking was the number of different organized activities in which kids participated. There were 156 different activities and

surprisingly many of these were offered in the community rather than in schools. These included a wide array of activities ranging from scouts to Vietnamese lessons. Although this survey is demographically representative, it does not geographically characterize all parts of the country. Because activities in different geographic locations vary, the abundance of organized activities/groups becomes even more significant. This is especially meaningful for a student who attends school outside of his/her community. Participating in a community based organized activity can become an important medium for making friends in their neighborhood.

Once the individual has chosen an activity and the transportation issue has been resolved, fear often becomes the biggest barrier. Parents and professionals often demonstrate a resistance to integration using the rationale that youth without disabilities will not want to become friends with youth with disabilities, or even worse, that people with disabilities will be mistreated by their peers. However, this survey shows that most young people are very open to recreating with kids their own age with disabilities (see Table 6). The majority of students indicated an interest in getting to know others better regardless of ability.

The information gained in this survey should be used as a guideline for implementing a similar survey in your community to determine priorities when assisting a person gain access to recreation. It is not recommended that only the activities mentioned in this paper be used, but rather that topics (for

example, sports or organized activities) be used as broader categories to generate new questionnaires or informal inquiries. This is especially important when considering how quickly some activities come "in" and other go "out". Furthermore, popular activities in Boston, Massachusetts may not even be available in other parts of the country (e.g., ice skating). When administering this type of survey, it is also important to take age and gender into account. What five year olds and ten year olds do is very different; likewise, no matter how much we do not want it to have an effect, at certain ages, males participate in very different activities than females.

It is also important to note that when this survey was administered, participants were not asked to list their choices in order of preference; therefore, all responses discussed in this paper reflect the most frequently chosen activities and not necessarily the most favorite activities. For example, it is hypothetically possible that although sports was the most frequently chosen for males in response to the question, "What do you do for fun or in your free time," it may not have been the overall favorite choice.

At any rate, this paper has shown how an individual or group can use a more formal method to identify popular recreation activities in a particular area for children, youth, and young adults. The results of this particular survey also provide some guidelines for initiating or changing the activities that currently exist in any school or community setting.

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Table 1
Survey Participants by Age and Gender

Gender / Age Group	MALES	FEMALES
3-5	33	24
6-8	54	64
9-11	65	71
12-15	67	51
16-18	40	90
19-22	22	38

Table 2

Most frequently chosen activities for top three categories in response to "What do you do for fun or in your free time?"

Toys		Sports		Individual Activities	
name	# of respondants	name	# of respondants	name	# of respondants
nintendo	68	sports	65	tv	101
play games	16	basketball	58	read	83
computer	14	baseball	55	listen to music	45
toys	13	bike	53	listen to radio	14
video games	11	swim	42	sleep	14
figures	11	football	20	pets	12
dolls	9	soccer	20	eat	9
board games	6	skateboard	16	drugs	6
barbies	6	exercize	15	collect comics	4
blocks	5	hockey	13	read comics	3
cards	4	tennis	9	get nails done	2
gameboy	4	rollerskate	8	make airplanes	2
puzzels	4	bowl	7	motorcycle	2
squirt guns	3	gymnastics	7	plant	2
toy cars	3	run	6		
legos	3	tag	6		
monopoly	2	swing	5		
		track	5		

Note. The Toys and Individual Activities categories include all toys/activities which had more than one response. The Sports category includes all sports that had more than five responses. All numbers are real numbers and not percentages.

Table 3

Which sports/physical activities do you most enjoy?

Most frequently named sports/physical activities for each age group

Gender / Age	Females				Males			
3-5	swimming (29%)	running (25%)	playground equipment (21%)	bike (17%)	baseball (36%)	soccer (30%)	basketball (27%)	playground equipment (21%)
6-8	swimming (34%)	soccer (27%)	baseball (20%)	Kickball (13%)	baseball (65%)	basketball (43%)	soccer (41%)	football (20%)
9-11	basketball (42%)	soccer (41%)	baseball (27%)	swimming (24%)	baseball (42%)	soccer 28%	basketball (27%)	hockey (18%)
12-14	basketball (53%)	soccer (31%)	softball (25%)	tennis volleyball swimming (20%)	baseball (55%)	basketball (42%)	football (37%)	hockey (18%)
15-17	swimming (27%)	softball (23%)	basketball 21%)	tennis (20%)	basketball (53%)	football (45%)	baseball (43%)	hockey (28%)
18-22	swimming (26%)	tennis (21%)	softball (18%)	tennis (20%)	basketball (53%)	football (45%)	baseball (43%)	hockey (28%)

Table 4

What musical instruments do you play?

Type of Instrument / Age	Brass	Keyboard	Percussion	Voice	String	Wind
3-5	0%	9%	5%	37%	11%	9%
6-8	0%	12%	3%	16%	8%	14%
9-11	6%	34%	6%	13%	13%	26%
12-14	1%	18%	4%	15%	13%	19%
15-17	2%	7%	2%	17%	7%	6%
18-22	0%	17%	3%	12%	15%	3%

Table 5

Organized Groups/Lessons (sorted by category)

Sports (51%*)		The Arts (28%*)	Social (18%*)	
aerobics	kickball	art class	4-H Club	play group
baseball	lacrosse	arts and crafts	AA	Portuguese Club
basketball	parks and recreation	ballet lessons	afterschool daycare	prom committee
bowling	scuba diving	band	boy scouts	sorority
cheerleading	skateboarders club	bass ensemble	boys and girls club	student council
coach sports	skating	chorus	Brownies	summer camp
color guard	skating lessons	dance	camp	teen club
cross-country	skiing	dance lessons	camp fire	Tiger Cubs
exercise	soccer	drama	CASPAR	volunteer
fishing club	softball	Indian dancing	chess	Yearbook Committee
fitness center	sports	jazz	chumpers club	youth group
floor hockey	stickball	knitting club	class day committee	
football	stilting	music	class officer	
golf	street hockey	music lessons	Cub Scouts	
gym class	swim lessons	orchestra	CYO	
gymnastics	swim team	painting class	day care	
gymnastic lessons	swimming	role playing game club	EDP	
hiking lessons	T-ball	singing group	fraternity	
hockey	tennis	tap	friendship club	
horseback riding	track	theater	Girl Scouts	
ice skating	volleyball	violin lessons	honor society	
ice skating lessons	waterskiing lessons	woodworking lessons	JCC	
intramurals	wrestling		Methodist Youth Fellowship	
karate	YMCA			

*Percentages represent number of timesactivities in the category were indicated by students surveyed.

Table 5 (continued)

Organized Groups/Lessons (sorted by category)

Religious (10%)	Academic (5%)	Political (4%)	Other (2%)
CCD	academic decathlon	Alliance Against Discrimination	Club House Team
church	book club	Kadima Club	model club
church ensemble	business coop	NAACP Youth Council	party time club
friends meeting	Chinese lessons	NROTC	Pathfinders
Hebrew school	computer lessons	SADD	planting group
monthly retreat	Cosmos science		quiet creek
peer ministry	DECA		redmen
Sunday school	French Club		spy club
	Greek school		spy war club
	homework club		Teddy Bear Chums
	Italian school		war club
	Police Explorers Club		wrecking club
	reading group		Burger King Kids Club
	SAT lessons		Mickey Mouse Club
	scholarship organization		Nintendo Club
	speaking		Rocky Horror Picture Show Fan Club
	teach		Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Club
	TEC intern		WLVI Kids Club
	theory class		
	Thomas Jefferson Forum		
	Vietnamese lessons		

Table 6
Would you Consider Inviting a Person with a Disability to Join You in "Having Some Fun?"

Response / Age	YES	NO	NOT SURE	NO ANSWER
3-5	59%	16%	18%	7%
6-8	62%	13%	24%	1%
9-11	55%	4%	39%	2%
12-14	54%	5%	35%	6%
15-18	56%	2%	40%	2%
19-22	68%	2%	27%	3%

Figure 1

What do you do for fun?

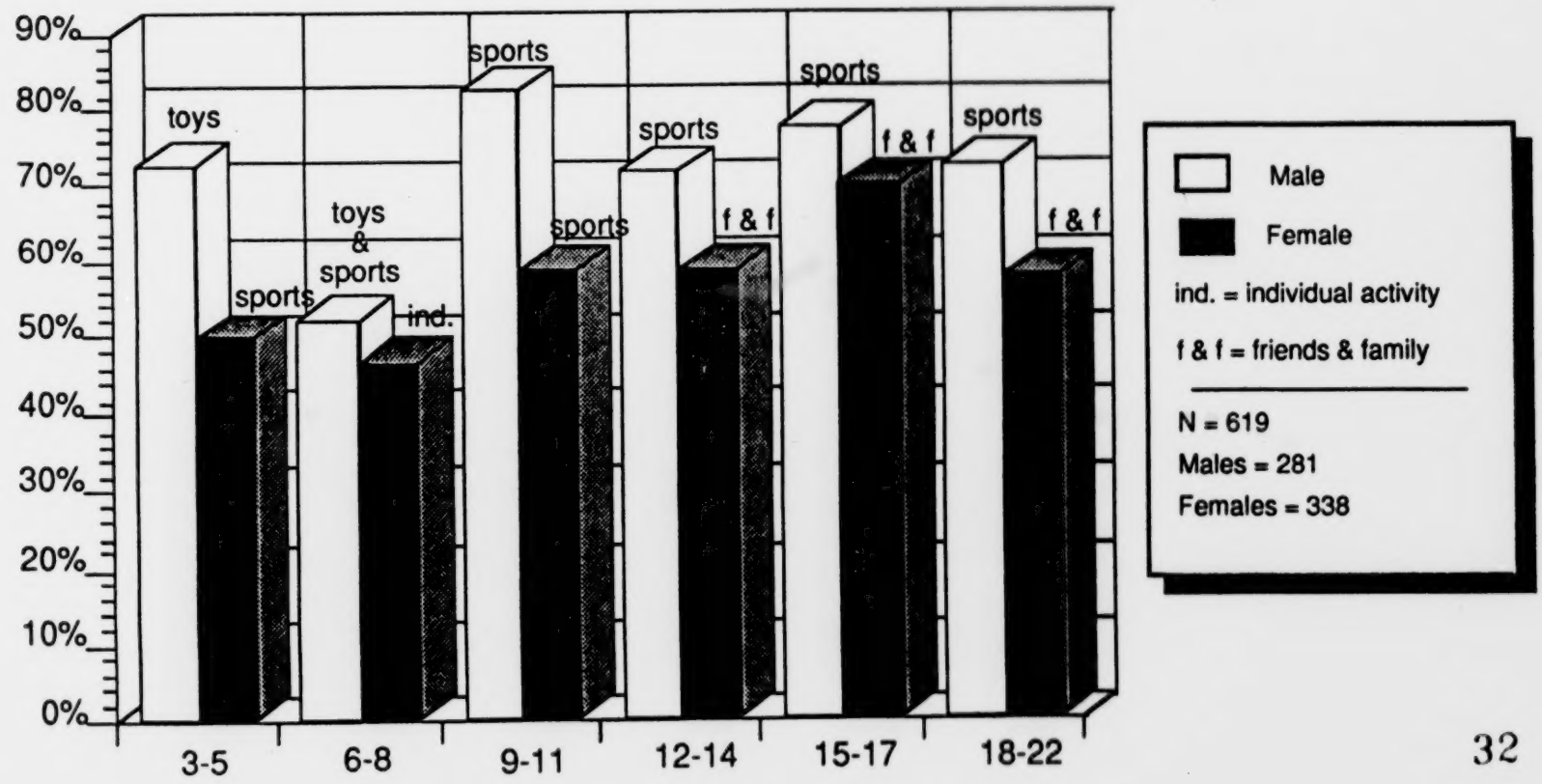

Figure 2

When you do something for fun, how many people are usually with you?

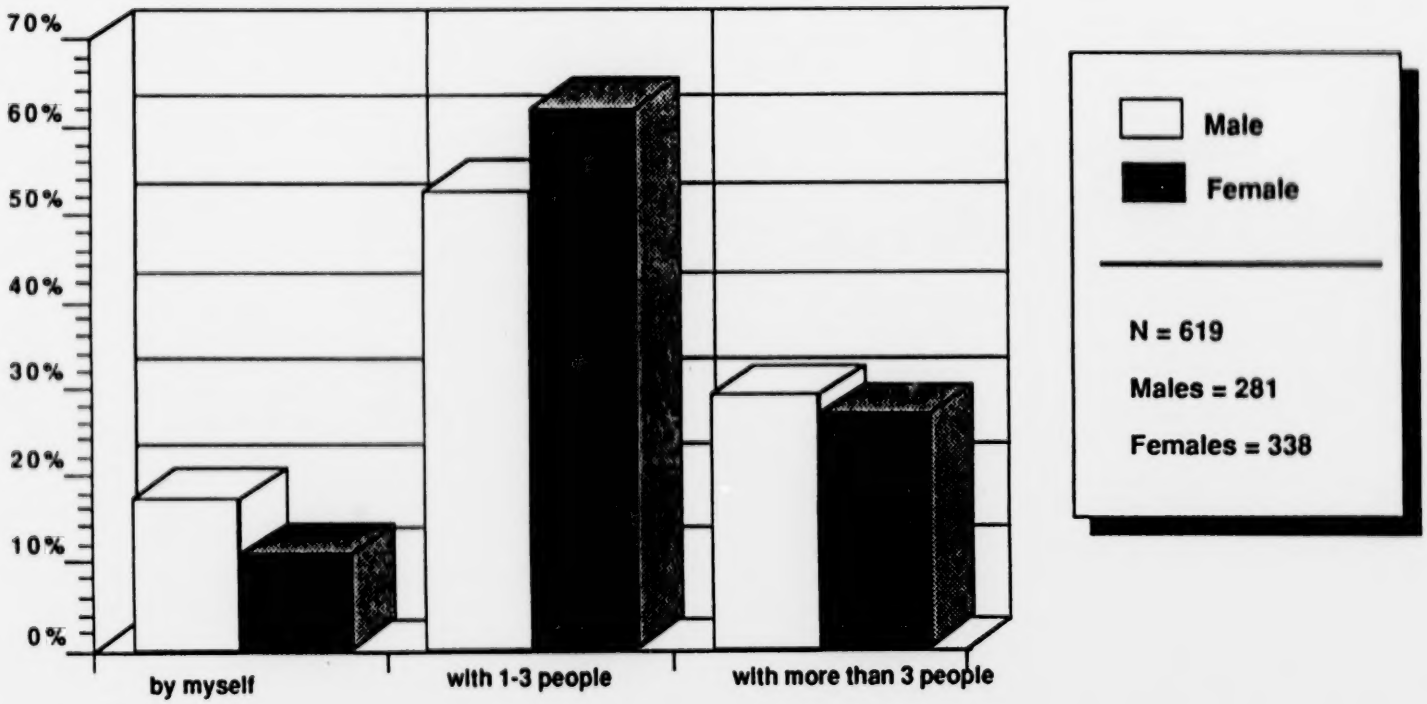

Figure 3

What type of transportation do you use?

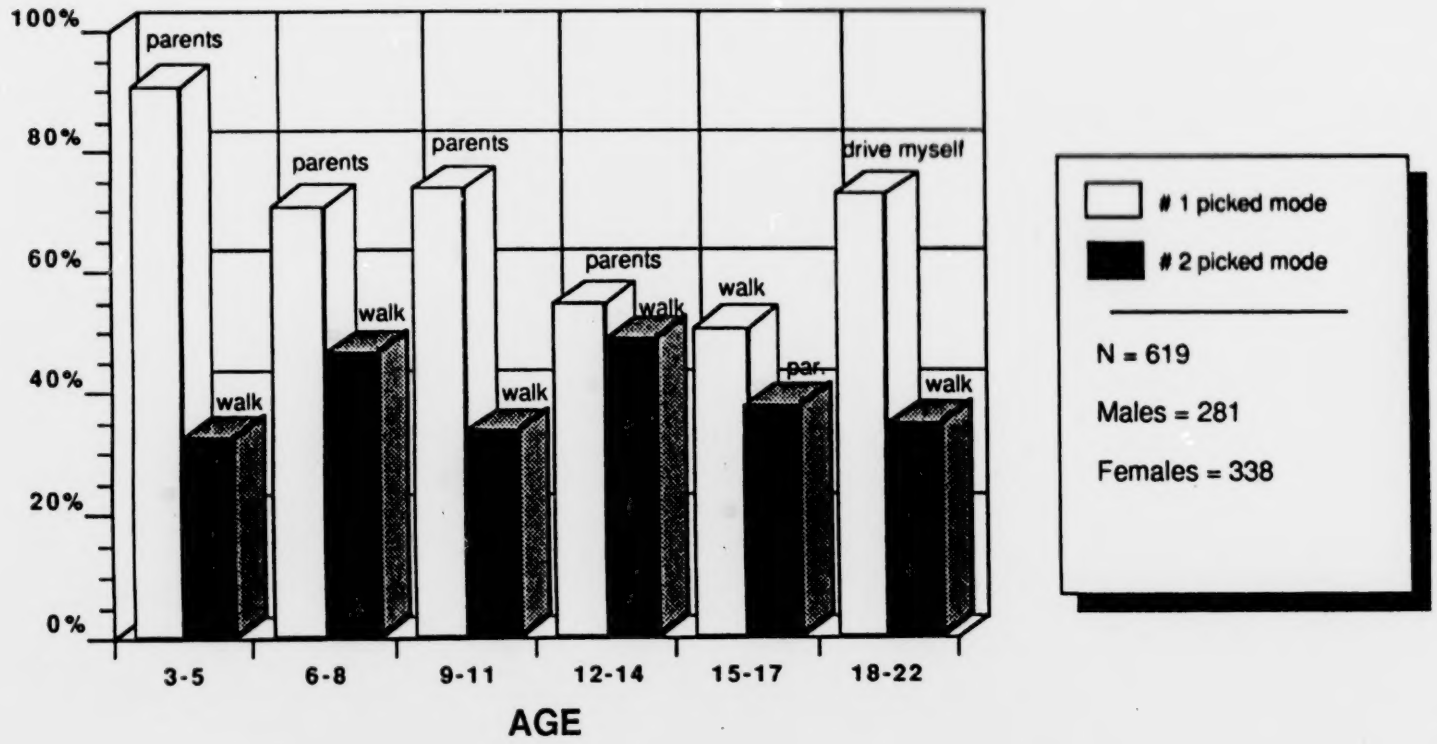

Figure 4
Most frequently chosen organized groups/lessons listed by category